

IDOLS IN THE FAMILY

GOLDEN TEXT

“Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.” (1 John 5:21)

USEFUL PRACTICE

Idol worship implies putting everything that takes God’s place first.

SCRIPTURE READING

Genesis 31:17-19, 33-35; Judges 17:1,3-5

Genesis 31

17 - Then Jacob put his children and his wives on camels,

18 - and he drove all his livestock ahead of him, along with all the goods he had accumulated in Paddan Aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan.

19 - When Laban had gone to shear his sheep, Rachel stole her father’s household gods.

33 - So Laban went into Jacob’s tent and into Leah’s tent and into the tent of the two female servants, but he found nothing. After he came out of Leah’s tent, he entered Rachel’s tent.

34 - Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them inside her camel’s saddle and was sitting on them. Laban searched through everything in the tent but found nothing.

35 - Rachel said to her father, "Don't be angry, my lord, that I cannot stand up in your presence; I'm having my period." So he searched but could not find the household gods.

Judges 17

1-Now a man named Micah from the hill country of Ephraim

3 - When he returned the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, she said, "I solemnly consecrate my silver to the LORD for my son to make an image overlaid with silver. I will give it back to you."

4 - So after he returned the silver to his mother, she took two hundred shekels of silver and gave them to a silversmith, who used them to make the idol. And it was put in Micah's house.

5- Now this man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and some household gods and installed one of his sons as his priest.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- I) To present** the context in which Rachel stole her father Laban's idols;
- II) To explain** the socio-political scenario in Israel when Micah embraced idolatry;
- III) To warn about** the dangers of idolatry within the family of God's people.

INTRODUCTION

In this lesson, we have two different stories that tell about living with idolatry at home. In the first case, we have Rachel, Jacob's wife, who knew that her husband served the God of her ancestors, and that He was powerful, invisible and had no need for idols in his image. However, Rachel felt unsure about her future. Feeling wronged by her father, who did not give her or her sister Leah any inheritance, she decided to steal the small statues, or her father's idols, which were the small gods inside Laban's household. The second case is that of Micah, an Ephraimite, who lived in the time of the judges in Israel, and who, uniting with the Danites, made idols and built a shrine for them in his house. In this lesson, we will look at the consequences of idolatry within a home.

I - THE IDOLS FOUND IN RACHEL'S TENT

1. The flight of Jacob and his family to the Promised Land.

After many years of work for his father-in-law, Laban, having prospered greatly, Jacob decided to return to the land of his ancestors (Gen. 31:3, 4). Due to the resentments that there were between him and his father-in-law, and seeing it was impossible to be free to live his own life, Jacob decided to flee Laban's lands, without saying anything to anyone. When his escape was discovered, Laban and his sons decided to go after him to make him return (Gen 31:22, 23).

2. Laban discovers the theft of his household idols.

Laban was an idolatrous man and had small gods inside his house to which he prayed and by which he believed he was helped. They were, in fact, "household gods" made of wood, stone or clay, whose images were venerated and adored as amulets for family and personal protection. Whoever owned them also had the right to inheritance. When Rachel realized that her father would not give her any inheritance, she stole his idols (Gen. 31:19). Upon arriving at Jacob's camp, Laban asked him about his idols and did not find them because Rachel had hidden them in the "saddle of a camel" and sat on them (Gen. 31:34).

3. Rachel uses a lie to hide the idol.

Rachel sat on the idols so that Laban would not find them. She used the justification that she was in her period in order not to get off the camel and, consequently, for her father not to find the idols there (Gen 31:35). It is clear that although Laban accused Jacob of robbing him, it was his daughter, Rachel, who stole his idols and, therefore, deceived him; and Laban did not find his idols. This episode caused a great argument between Jacob and his father-in-law (Gen. 31:36).

II – A SANCTUARY FOR THE GODS IN THE HOUSE OF MICAH

1. Micah's idolatry and unethical character (Judg. 17:1-4).

Despite a special name, meaning "Who is like the Lord our God?", Micah did not live up to the importance of the name he had because he did not honor God in his life. He had a family, although the biblical account does not name his wife; his mother lived with him and was very rich. The people living in the hill country of Ephraim had been corrupted by idolatry. Israel, as a whole, had completely abandoned the Law of Moses (Judges 8:27) and the people of Israel had adhered to a religious

syncretism that implied full apostasy. In addition to abandoning the law of the Lord, families began to adopt this religious syncretism into their own homes, admitting “household idols” which they worshiped and adored expecting to obtain material favors. Moral and ethical values were abandoned, and Micah was the result of this moral corruption. So it was not difficult for him to rob his own mother.

2. Micah's abomination (Judg. 17:5).

Micah had built a sanctuary for small gods, that is, “household gods” in his house. Scripture says, “Now this man Micah had a shrine, and he made an ephod and some household gods and installed one of his sons as his priest” (v.5). Micah had robbed his own mother, without her knowledge. He took along 1,100 shekels of silver, 13 kilos worth of the metal. As his mother did not know it had been her own son who had robbed her, she cursed the thief (Judg. 17:2). Fearing to suffer from his mother's curse, Micah went to her house and confessed his sin, and fully returned all the money: “He returned the money to his mother” (Judg. 17:4). His mother removed the curse and took part of the money, and gave it for the silversmith to make the idol for Micah's house.

3. Micah had a shrine (Judg. 17:5, 6).

From the biblical context, Micah's family was Jewish, but having fallen away from fidelity to God, they served false gods which were represented by small idols, called “household gods”. Micah and his family also claimed to serve the God of Israel. However, in those historical days of the judges, “everyone did as they saw fit” (Judg. 17:6). Of his own accord, and already with his “household gods” in his home, Micah also decided to have an “ephod” made, which was worn only by the Israelite high priest, and he gave it to his son, installing him as a priest in his household. Then a Levite shows up who had no place to live in and Micah calls him to live in his house and become the priest of his family, by the God of Israel (Judg. 17.9). This mixture of false deities was present in Micah's house. Everyone who got to his house would find “the god” they wanted to invoke. Unfortunately, a man from the tribe of Ephraim, who was supposed to honor the God of his people, who delivered him from Egypt, now finds himself committed to the idols of a pagan religion.

III – IDOLATRY WITHIN HOMES

In both the story of Rachel and that of Micah, the belief in “household idols” indicated the strong pagan influence on Israelite homes. From these two biblical cases, we are called to reflect on idolatry today.

1. The household idols of today.

The apostle John faced a problem in his ministry with "household idols" of Christian families who struggled to get rid of them. Therefore, the apostle advised: "Dear children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21). For a person who does not believe in Christ, the Christian life is unreal, since people live in the world by what they see and feel, not by what the Christian life requires.

Now idols are temporary and represent what is false and empty because they are misleading. Anything can become an idol at home, for example: a job, a car, money, a child, a father or mother, a lifestyle. Now, how to identify idolatry inside and outside your home? Anything that demands loyalty and honor above God is idolatry. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "An idol is nothing at all in the world" (1 Corinthians 8:4). Therefore, it is dangerous to deify people, placing them in God's place or above Him.

2. Identifying modern-day idols within homes.

The "media culture" proliferation has entered our homes; and, whether we like it or not, we live with it on a daily basis. The media itself is neutral, because it is the means by which it serves society as a communication channel through the radio, television, internet, smartphones, computer networks, among other means. It is a mode of communication that must be used wisely. However, we cannot be manipulated by it, which is part of a technological and intellectual world in which we all live. What we cannot do is make uncritical use of these instruments. We need to take into account the caution regarding the danger of the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16, 17).

3. We need to fight back against the enemies of the family. Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount, "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?" (Matt. 5:13). The church is the salt of the earth and, therefore, it is the only institution in society capable of preventing the corruption of our moral and spiritual values. To preserve the family, attacked by the infectious virus of the worldly system, it is necessary to break "the household idols" that take God's place in family life.

CONCLUSION

We need to invest in the family, building up spiritual and moral barriers within homes to save our children and prepare them for a healthy Christian life that glorifies God. Therefore, the idols of today has to be removed from among us, so that they will not come to take God's place in our lives.